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Lent IV-A
John 9:1-42

Divine Creativity

Ever have a day when it seems NO ONE is listening to a word you said?! Maybe you were in a group, and people were more or less speaking AT you, rather than TO you. You might just as well have been invisible. Or maybe you were having a one-on-one conversation with someone, and they either would **not hear**, or were **unable to understand** what you were saying. That's the kind of Gospel story we have this morning.

It is a long passage, and it has five different scenes in it. But every scene is driven by questions like: What is this? How is that? Why is this? Who did what? A whole lot of questions. The repetition of these questions highlights the fact that in his society, not being able to see meant that any testimony that the man born blind, our main character, gave was basically hearsay – even testimony about his own life.

Except for the very last scene, these conversations leave everyone frustrated, someone unheard, and most people unwilling to hear what they are being told. Some of this reads like a comedy, and some like a tragedy. The story highlights the many ways human communication can fail, from the comically inane, to the willfully ignorant, to the intentionally mean-spirited. For a species that has developed language to such a high degree, we can be woefully inadequate, obtuse, or obstinate when it comes to listening to each other.

That lack of listening, of HEARING, each other, is costly. Some people in this story would rather leave this man blind and destitute, than accept that he could **EVER be more than** his disability or his poverty. No: His suffering must somehow be his fault, or his families' fault. No: His station in life has been set by the way things are, by his own short-comings, or even by God's ordering of our lives. Even as he stands before them and answers their questions, giving them the TRUTH about what is going on in his own life, his **social standing** as a person blind from birth invalidates everything he says, and everything he could become. Not for one second does anyone entertain the possibility that maybe things could be different, even when the difference (i.e. his healing) is staring them in the face and SEEING THEM for the first time. Unless he would just echo back other people's ideas, no one can listen to or even hear him.

The only one in this story who is not hostage to this willful ignorance and intentional mean-spiritedness is Jesus. Jesus SEES this man BEYOND his present limits, beyond his present compromises, beyond his present suffering. And then Jesus does something astounding: he creates a new reality, a new future, what we would call NEW CONDITIONS ON THE GROUND. And just like God creating Adam from the dust of the earth, Jesus creates new eyes for this man from the mud at their feet, and he says something quite amazing:

Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work."

The Hebrew word for **work** that our Greek text is based upon is the same as **create**. So now, let's hear that teaching once more:

Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's creativity might be revealed in him. We must create like God does while it is day; night is coming when no one can create.

Inside this teaching, inside this story, inside John's Gospel, is this astounding notion that we are co-creators with God. We must (as the text says) WE MUST CREATE while we have the opportunity to do so. No wonder the theologians of Jesus' day were horrified! What kind of blasphemy was at work in this so-called miracle? Who is this blind beggar to up-end an entire system of theology? And who is this charlatan who purports to be a co-creator with God?

If we doubt that the Pharisees' resentment is alive and well today, we only have to look at our own way of dealing with disability, poverty, and misfortune: SOMEONE IS TO BLAME ... SOMEONE MUST BE BLAMED. THAT, sadly, is our go-to position. Just like John's Pharisees. Today many of our institutions, most particularly our government, have adopted, wholesale, this kind of pusillanimous and punishing blaming! Just like the argument between the man born blind and the pharisees, when listening to each other stops, so does civil discourse. It has led to abuses of civil rights, atrocities at home and abroad, and an unchecked military

authority already producing war crimes. The failure to listen to one another is a casualty that takes place long before any blood is spilt.

But there stands Jesus - speaking to us - TELLING US, that in the midst of all sorts of human suffering, God's CREATIVITY is still possible. And what's more, WE are the ones who can make that divine creativity happen... WHILE IT IS DAY. Which is to say, while we have the time to do it.

There is nothing rational in this. There is nothing measured in this. Creating new conditions on the ground is not about balancing anything. Because Jesus sees his suffering, this man begins to see. Because Jesus hears his story, this man can write a different ending to it. Whenever we see and hear the people around us, we can create healing and reconciliation. We can write a different story, with a different ending, than the ones written in this morning's news.

As we go through life, and all the different kinds of pain it brings, we may find it harder and harder to see or hear about suffering. But it would be an even greater tragedy if we stopped seeing and listening to each other. Of course, our own strength IS NOT enough to bear it all. The good news of the Gospel is that we have recourse to a strength beyond our own, a sight beyond our own, and an energy beyond what we can conceive. That is what John's Gospel is all about: an unimaginable energy force that we can unleash if we recognize the divine creativity offered to us in the hands and face of Christ. Life is too short to spend on blaming, but it is never too short for creativity. So just like Jesus in this story: go out today and start making some mud!

Reference

Bruno Barnhard, *The Good Wine: Reading John from the Center*. 1993. Pp.103-142.